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ABSTRACT

Potential costs and benefits associated with fathers' participation in household chores and child care, here called "family work," were explored in this study. More specifically, the extent to which fathers' participation in family work was related to fathers' experience of stress and father-child reations were examined. The study involved 91 father-adolescent dyads who completed questionnaires on two occasions, 6 months apart. Fathers completed measures concerning their: (1) participation in household chores and child care; (2) feelings of stress; and (3) acceptance of their seventh graders and the frequency and intensity of conflict with them. Adolescents reported on paternal acceptance and the frequency and intensity of conflict with their fathers. Findings suggested that frequent performance of household tasks may be a salient concomitant of stress for fathers in two-earner families. High father involvement in child care was associated with higher acceptance of their seventh graders, supporting the claim that father participation in child care tasks presages warmer father-adolescent relations. Some evidence, however, suggested that fathers who frequently participated in child care had more frequent conflict with their adolescents. Implications of the findings are discussed. (RH)

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Fathers' Participation in Family Work: Consequences for Fathers' Stress and Father-Child Relations

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The present study explored the potential costs and benefits associated with fathers' participation in household chores and child care, or "family work". More specifically, we examined the extent to which fathers' participation in family work was related to fathers' experience of stress and father-child relations. Although previous research has shown the importance of fathers' participation in child care for children's development (e.g., Baruch & Barnett, 1981) or how fathers' contribution to household chores may ease stress in working mothers (Hoffman, 1983; Pearlin, 1975), relatively few studies have investigated how fathers' participation in family work affects fathers themselves.

One potential consequence is that fathers may experience stress. According to Pearlin and Schooler (1978), the seedbeds of stress are structured around the conditions and demands of the daily social roles that individuals inhabit (e.g., parent, worker, spouse). When these conditions and demands create hardships, challenges, and conflicts they are seen as life strains. If strains persist they may result in global stress reactions (e.g, depression and anxiety) as well as situation-specific stress reactions (e.g., parental stress and work stress).

High participation in family work could constitute such a life strain and thus have the potential for arousing stress. Although studies by Baruch and Barnett (1986), Russell (1983), and Gilbert (1985) have shown that fathers who were more involved in family work reported greater difficulty meetings the demands of their careers, the relation between fathers' family work and

indices of stress has received little empirical attention.

Although there seem to be some costs associated with fathers' participation in family work, such as fathers' feelings of stress, there may be also potential benefits for fathers, namely, a warmer and more accepting relationship with their children. Graeme Russell (1983) and Michael Lamb (1986) assert that when fathers spend more time with their children, they have more opportunity to display and receive affection, and thus develop a closer bond with their children. On the other hand, spending more time with one's children may open the door for more conflicted interactions. Indeed, previous research has shown that more participative fathers may accept and also have more conflict with their children (Russell, 1983; Sagi, 1982). Most research, however, has focused on young children tested on a single occasion. Moreover, no study has investigated the nature of the relationship between father participation and father-adolescent relations at more than one point in time.

Using longitudinal data from a sample of fathers of adolescents, this investigation explores the following questions: a) Are fathers' levels of participation in family work (household tasks and child care duties) related to their feelings of stress (i.e., depression, anxiety, parental stress, and household labour stress)?, and b) To what extent are fathers' levels of participation in family work related to qualitative aspects of father-adolescent relations (i.e., fathers' acceptance of adolescents, and intensity and frequency of father-adolescent conflict)?

METHOD

Subjects

Data were collected from 91 fathers-adolescent dyads participating in the Two Earner Family Study, a short term longitudinal study consisting of fathers, mothers, and seventh graders in dual earner families. The families cut across the working and middle classes. The fathers in this sample were on average 40 years old and had completed 14 years of education. They had been employed for an average of 17 years (SD=7.4) and worked 41 hours a week (SD=9.1). The adolescents (50 girls and 41 boys) were on average 11 and 1/2 years old. Data for the present analyses are from questionnaires completed by the fathers and adolescents on two occasions six months apart--August 1988 (time 1) and February 1989 (time 2).

Measures

Family work. Fathers completed six measures concerning their participation in family work. The first three assessed fathers' participation in household chores. The hourly estimate (Pleck, 1983) indicated the total number of hours fathers spent in the previous week doing household chores. The frequency variable (Almeida, 1989) indicated how often fathers performed household chores in a week (17 items; alpha=.75). The proportional share variable (Bird, Bird, & Scruggs, 1983) assessed fathers' proportional responsibility (relative to their spouse) for the completion of household chores (17 items; alpha=.68). Likewise, three measures were used to assess fathers' participation in child care: hourly estimate of time

spent taking care of, or doing things with children, frequency of child care tasks (3 items; alpha=.70), and proportional share of child care tasks (3 items; alpha=.52).

Stress

Variables measuring fathers' feelings of stress included Speilberger's State anxiety scale (20 items; alpha=.93), the CES-D depression Scale (20 items; alpha=.88), Pearlin's parental stress scale (7 items; alpha=.92), a household labour stress scale (7 items; alpha=.87), and a composite of these four scales which was termed overall stress (factor loadings ranged from .76 to .87).

Father-Adolescent Relations

Aspects of father-adolescent relations were assessed through father and adolescent reports of fathers' acceptance of their seventh grade children (Schaefer, 1965) (24 items; alpha=.92) as well as father and adolescent reports of frequency and intensity of father-adolescent conflict (Prinz et al., 1979).

Results

First, a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses was conducted in order to examine how well fathers' participation in family work predicted fathers' feelings of stress at time 1 and at time 2. The sequence in the hierarchical multiple regressions was as follows: On the first step, the fathers' SES was entered. On the second step, the family work variables were added. This procedure was used to evaluate whether participation in family work explained variance in stress above and beyond that explained by SES. The criterion variables were: Anxiety and

depression at times 1 & 2, and parental stress, household labour stress, and overall stress at time 2 only.

Table 1 presents these results. At time 1, fathers who participated more frequently in household chores were more anxious and more depressed than fathers who participated less frequently in household chores.
At time 2, fathers who participated more often in household tasks were more depressed and experienced higher levels of stress in their parenting duties and more overall stress.

Insert Table 1 about here

The second set of analyses examined whether participation in family work at time 1 was linked to changes in stress from time 1 to time 2. Anxiety and depression scores were used because they were available for both times of measurement. Residual change scores were computed by regressing time 2 the stress measures on their respective time 1 scores. Correlations among the residual change scores were calculated to determine the extent to which family work was associated with changes in fathers' stress. This analysis revealed that fathers who frequently participated in household chores reported increases in anxiety (r=.18, p < .05) and depression (r=.34, p < .05) over the six month period.

Taken together, the pattern of results suggests that frequent performance of household tasks may be a salient concomitant of stress for fathers in two-earner families.

Father-Adolescent Relations

The next set of analyses pertained to the linkages between father participation in child care and father-adolescent relations. Fathers' level of participation did not differ in families of adolescent boys and adolescent girls. Also fathers' participation and its association to fathers adolescent relations did not differ by SES. To examine the extent to which fathers' participation in child care was related to father-adolescent relations at time 1 and time 2 correlations were computed using both father and adolescent reports of father-adolescent relations. Table 2 presents these correlations. The pattern of results suggests that higher father involvement was associated with higher acceptance. With respect to correlations for conflict, there was some evidence to suggest that fathers who frequently participated in child care had more frequent conflict with their adolescents. However fathers who were proportionally more responsible for the completion of child care tasks at time 1 reported decreases in conflict. Given this inconsistency, findings for conflict should be considered tentatively.

Insert Table 2 about here

If participating in child care leads fathers to become more sensitive and warm parents, then changes over time toward higher acceptance would be expected among fathers who are more rather than less involved. The final set of analyses examined correlations between father participation in child care at time 1

and changes in father acceptance from time 1 to time 2. Table 3 presents these results. These findings indicate that when fathers participate in child care, their levels of acceptance increase over six months, according to fathers and adolescents. Whether participation causes change in acceptance was not addressed in this study. Nevertheless, these findings support the claim that father participation in child care presages warmer and more accepting father-adolescent relations.

Insert Table 3 about here

Directions for Future Research

The study of fathers' involvement in family work has important implications for fathers' experience of stress, father-child relations, and public policy. First, whereas previous research has focused primarily on fathers' paid work as a source of stress, the present investigation looks to fathers' family work as a potentially important stressor. A more complete picture of fathers' stress would be gained by studying father's paid work, fathers' family work, and their interrelations in single designs. Researchers might also ask what personal characteristics and coping strategies fathers can use to successfully adapt to the combination of family and work responsibilities. Answers to these questions would provide useful information about how fathers and mothers can cope successfully with the demands of the dual-earner lifestyle.

Fathers' involvement in family work may also affect their

children. We have seen that fathers' involvement in child care may be associated with more accepting father-child relations and increased father-child conflict. Although these results may appear to be contradictory, it is easy to imagine how spending time with any individual might lead to both a closer relationship and more opportunities for disagreements.

It remains to be seen what impact father-adolescent relations have on adolescent development. Few studies have investigated the role played by fathers during adolescence, although many writers have pointed to the importance of fathers for sex-role development, cognitive development, and social skills in younger children. Two questions for future research, then, are first, whether father involvement has direct effects on adolescent development, and second whether the relation between father involvement and adolescent development is mediated by an indirect effect of father-adolescent relations. In this way, we may come to better understand the process underlying fathers' contribution to child and adolescent development.

Finally the present findings have implications for public policy. The dramatic increase of maternal paid employment has made it apparent that it is unfair to expect that mothers continually be solely responsible for family work. In order for two-earner families to cope with the physical and psychological demands associated with this lifestyle, fathers need to contribute actively in all aspects of family work. Therefore, employers and policy-makers need to recognize fathers' needs by expanding opportunities to combine work and parenting activities.

This would be accomplished by establishing employer-based child care, flexible work schedules, and time off to care for sick children or to attend teacher conferences. Providing flexibility and social supports for employees could have positive effects on the quality of family life in two-earner families.

In conclusion, we have seen that father participation in family work has many implications for family life. The understanding of the costs and benefits of the two-earner family would be advanced by integrating the impact of this life-style on fathers, mothers, and children together. By focusing on all members of the family and the broader social context in which they live, a more complete picture of the dynamics of two-earner families may emerge.

Table 1

Regressions Predicting Father Stress From SES and Father Participation in Family Work

Dependent Variable	Significant Predictors	Beta	Step R^2	Final R^2
Anxiety (T1)	Household Chores Freq.	.26	.08*	.12*
Anxiety (T2)	SES	-.26	.07*	.08
Depression (T1)	SES	-.40	.16**	
	Household Chores Freq.	.25	.06*	.22**
Depression (T2)	Household Chores Freq.	.12	.09*	.13*
Parenting Stress (T2)	Household Chores Freq.	.22	.11*	.13*
Household Labor Stress (T2)	None			
Overall Stress Stress (T2)	Household Chores Freq.	.28	.13*	.17**

T1=Time 1. T2=Time 2. N=91 (time 1). N=75 (time 2).
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 2

Correlations Between Participation in Child Care and Father-Adolescent Relations

	Father Participation in Child Care					
	Hourly Estimate		Frequency		Proportion	
	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
Acceptance:						
Father Report	.35*	.21*	.22*	.10	.17*	.17
Adolescent Report	.17*	-.11	.10	-.08	.22*	.05
Conflict:						
Father Report	.08	.03	.11	.23*	-.18*	.07
Adolescent Report	.12	-.12	.17*	-.04	.10	.02

T1=time 1. T2=time 2. N=91 (time 1). N=79 (time 2).

*p<.05.

Table 3

Correlations Between Participation in Child Care and Change in Father Acceptance

Change in Acceptance:	Father Participation in Child Care		
	Hourly Estimate Time 1	Frequency Time 1	Proportion Time 1
Father Report	.08	.35**	.37**
Adolescent Report	.19*	.08	.23*

N = 79.

*p<.05. **p<.01.